Historically the most important theater, U.S. European Command was responsible for preventing and defeating a Soviet invasion of Europe. Since the Soviet collapse, the Command transformed itself to deal with new contingencies in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans. At its helm is the dual-hatted American European commander who is also NATO’s supreme allied commander. Throughout its history, the European commander always served as a diplomat to maintain consensus within NATO against the Soviet Union. With the Soviet threat gone, the commander continues to build consensus to shape Alliance policy in the absence of an overwhelming threat.

Tragedy in the Balkans provided the European commander the impetus to restructure the European Command and to test NATO’s new strategic concept. In 1999, the new structure and strategy were tested when NATO attacked Yugoslavia. The air strikes highlighted the difficulties military commanders face in multinational settings. In particular, the supreme allied commander was confronted with two interrelated missions: to compel Yugoslav President Solobodan Milosevic to submit and to maintain diplomatic support for the air operation. This chapter provides an analysis of the diplomatic aspects of being the European commander, addresses the difficulties of coalition warfare, and highlights the steps taken by General Wesley K. Clark to maintain the NATO Alliance while prosecuting an air campaign against Yugoslavia.
Historical Significance

When World War II ended, General Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, became the European Command. The purpose of the reorganization was “. . . to place in the hands of a single commander responsibility for the conduct of military operations of the land, naval and air forces.” Operations were aimed at defeating a Soviet invasion of Europe. Although the European Command was planned as a joint command, it did not become one until recently. Always leading the defense against the Soviet Union was an Army general.3

In 1951, the position of the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) was created, and Air Force, Navy, and Army forces were unified under a single commander. Then, the mission included: providing combat-ready forces to support U.S. commitments to NATO, planning military operations, administering military assistance programs (including those in the Middle East), and negotiating basing rights throughout the region. With U.S. and NATO troops under his command, the European commander was responsible for not only shoring up Western defenses against a very large Soviet military, but also ensuring unity among European countries on defense issues. From its outset, the position of European commander was diplomatic in nature.

An International Command

Until 1949, the commander of the European Command was responsible for administering Germany, but as the Soviet threat became clear, the European Command quickly evolved into an operational headquarters designed to deter and, if necessary, defeat a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Headquartered at Patch Barracks in Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany, the European Command emphasized land warfare. At its peak, over 300,000 soldiers were stationed in Europe, primarily in Germany.

With the U.S. military headquarters located in Germany, and NATO Headquarters located in France (now Belgium), General Eisenhower invested much power in his deputy located in Germany. General Eisenhower informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “A matter of great importance will be the rank, previous experience and ability of the officer who will be selected as my Deputy. Since, under my concept, this officer will have a maximum of delegated authority . . . consulting me only on matters of fundamental policy and critical problems, it is essential that